BIRKBECK
University of London

Minutes of the Student Experience and Widening Participation Committee
12 May 2010

Present:
Mrs T King (Chair)
Professor J Annette
Mr N Buckle (for Dr J Gill)
Mr R Caldwell
Dr F Candlin
Dr M Cook
Mrs A Dierks
Mr K Harrison
Ms A Jamieson
Ms C McDonald
Mr P Payne
Mr M Pimm
Mr A Schmidt
Dr M Weait

In attendance:
Mr R Bell
Mr D David
Mr S Deville
Mr T Pearce
Ms C Terrey

Apologies:
Ms P Crampton
Professor S Jackson
Dr J Nicklin
Mr D Pateman
Mr J Smith

21 MINUTES OF THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE AND WIDENING PARTICIPATION COMMITTEE HELD ON 14 January 2010

21.1 Confirmed:
The minutes of the meeting of 14 January 2010.
22 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

22.1 Noted:
There were no matters arising that did not appear elsewhere on the agenda.

23 REPORT TO THE ACADEMIC BOARD EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

23.1 Noted:
At its meeting on 23 February 2010, the Academic Board Executive Committee (ABExCo) received and noted the Student Experience and Widening Participation Committee’s (SEWP) report of the meeting of 14 January 2010.

24 CHAIR’S REPORT

24.1 The Chair described the route by which the retention strategy had been developed. The proposal to develop a Birkbeck retention strategy originated at SEWP as retention was a particular focus of student experience work at Birkbeck. Subsequently the development of a retention strategy became a joint piece of work between this Committee and the Teaching Quality Enhancement Committee (TQEC). The Chair and the Pro-Vice-Master for Learning and Teaching organised a retention awayday in February to consider the college’s approach to retention and to support the development of the retention strategy. Subsequent meetings of the Strategic Planning Committee, ABExCo and the Academic Board have supported the development of this strategy.

24.2 £50k JISC funding had been obtained to assist development of the online aspects of retention in support of the retention strategy.

25 RETENTION STRATEGY

25.1 Noted:
The strategy had been endorsed for purposes of resource by the Strategic Planning Committee on behalf of Finance and General Purposes Committee, and the TQEC had endorsed this approval. SEWP endorsed this approval and agreed to recommend endorsement also by ABExCo.

25.2 There needed to be measurable and deliverable targets and a clear locus of accountability.

25.3 Recommended:
Approval of the strategy be endorsed by ABExCo.
Understanding Birkbeck Recruitment Data

25.4 Noted:
The report presented by the Management Information Analyst was a preliminary analysis of undergraduate degree students who withdrew in the first year, and between years one and two across cohorts.

25.5 Hypotheses to predict likely candidates for withdrawal were being tested, including late applicants, late enrollers and those in receipt of government funding.

25.6 Comparing withdrawal targets nationally, Birkbeck compared well with other institutions within the sector. There were however no benchmarks against which withdrawals could be measured. Patterns of withdrawal varied between programmes.

Action:
Andi Schmidt offered the services of a mathematician in BEI to investigate data to establish significant retention trends

What Works?

25.7 Noted:
The final report from the “What Works?” project, initiated as one of the Strategic Review projects at the last meeting of the Committee.

25.8 Action:
Best practice at Birkbeck and elsewhere needed to be shared. Assistant Deans for Retention would meet to share and develop understanding.

25.9 Action:
Annual reports on retention needed to be analysed. The timing of the issue and consideration of the reports would be reviewed. The Deputy Academic Registrar (Academic Services) to discuss this with the Assistant Registrar (Academic Quality Assurance).

Transition to HE Project

25.10 Noted:
A report from the “Transition to HE” project, which incorporated the “A Development of the MyBirkbeck Website and Student Communication” retention project, which had been approved at the last meeting. The project aimed to incentivise potential students to apply and enrol, and assist first year student retention by introducing appropriate interventions as required.

25.11 Received:
The Transition into HE summer programme, 14-25 June 2010.

25.12 £50,000 had been received from JISC to promote online delivery of the project. The Marketing Officer seconded to My Birkbeck Student Support Services,
presented the draft website structure. Topics included where am I at the moment?, what is student life like?, how to study, what support can I get as a student and links to the relevant areas of the College website. JISC had funded similar projects at other universities, including Edinburgh Napier, Bradford, Derby, Central Lancashire and Sussex.

26 WIDENING PARTICIPATION

26.1 WIDENING PARTICIPATION STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT (WPSA)

Noted:

26.2 All HEIs were required to submit a WPSA to provide evidence that widening participation was strategically embedded at all levels. A successful WPSA submission would ensure continued institutional WP funding.

26.3 Birkbeck’s WPSA was developed by a working group comprised of the College Secretary, the Academic Registrar, the PVM Lifelong Learning and Engagement, the PVM Student Experience and the Head of Outreach and Widening Participation. An early draft was submitted to HEFCE as requested in June 2009. HEFCE “accepted” the draft as evidence of work in progress.

26.4 The emerging WPSA text was considered by SEWP at its meetings in October 2009 and January 2010. The final WPSA document including the subsequent development of a financial statement and detailed targets and milestones for the coming three years was approved by the May committee.

26.5 When approved by the College committees and Governors, the final WPSA document would be submitted to HEFCE. The targets would then be reported against annually for the next three years, starting from December 2010. HEFCE have not yet created an evaluation template for HEIs to use as part of their annual reporting, but this should be available in September 2010.

26.6 Recommended:
Approval of the WPSA be endorsed by ABExCo.

27 REPORTS FROM CENTRAL SERVICES

MyBirkbeck Student Services

27.1 Noted:
An update from the MyBirkbeck Student Services Manager on the development of the MyBirkbeck website and the Student Services Forum. Video material would be introduced on to the website, focus groups had been established, and the student support forum was looking at information sent out to students and reviewing the student guide.
**Student Centre Helpdesk**

27.2  Noted:
The helpdesk would now be located within Registry Services (managed by Simon Deville) as 70% business related to registry matters.

27.3  A report on usage of the MyBirkbeck front and back offices, January-April 2010, demonstrated patterns were becoming established. Staffing levels were being devised to meet the varying levels of usage at different times of the year.

27.4  On-line application was being extended, and certain former Registry Services functions were being centralised within the Student Centre.

**Outreach and Widening Participation Team**

27.5  Report from the Head of the Outreach and Widening Participation Team, giving an overview of the key activities of the Unit. This included partnership and development activities, events, support given to schools and work with the Development and Alumni team to encourage contact with donors and charitable foundations.

28  **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting would be during the autumn term 2010. The dates of the meetings for the 2010-2011 session would be announced in due course.